[GEIDAM]

G. Social Stratification in Geidam.

56 178 177 369 Social stratification in Geidam may be viewed in terms of the interaction of three sets of variables. These are: the traditional Kanuri system of social stratification; the social structure of an urban community; and the influences on Kanuri culture brought about by contact with the Industrial West.

1. The traditional stratification system in Geidam.

565 Aristocracy in Geidam is represented by a handful of individuals. However, though they are few they occupy the [559] positions of greatest power in the community. The term aristocrat properly refers only to Yerima Mustapha, the Ajia, for only he holds a noble title granted him by the Shehu. However, Alkali Baba Kura, the son of a chief Imam and himself a powerful figure in the judiciary, and Sidi Momoh Yerima's nephew and an NA messenger in Geidam, must also be considered to belong to the aristocracy, particularly in view of their close ties through kinship with members of the aristocracy. Kinship links to the aristocracy, however, are an ambiguous criterion, since kinship is not always the determining factor in succession. Moreover, a number of other individuals in Geidam, particularly among the NA Malams, are also able to trace ties of kinship to the aristocracy.

567 Slaves are a distinctive social element in the community only if their masters, too, are present as members of the com-

[BEIDAM]

463 565 Geidam whose activities fall primarily in the economic sphere of Kanuri culture. The activities of other specialists are concerned largely with the political sphere of Kanuri culture. Still others specialize in the religious sphere of their culture. Though the distinctions are never absolute, and in a sense all individuals are involved in every aspect of their culture, it is clear that, for example, one group is more concerned with the economic aspects of their culture than with the religious aspects, as they carry out the behavior which characterizes that group. Though all traders pray (along with everyone else), their activities as traders are primarily concerned with economics and not with religion; though all Malams handle currency (along with everyone else), their activities as Malams are primarily concerned with religion. For any given individual, group membership is operationally defined by the amount of time which he devotes to a given type of activity. Thus the craftsman spends most of his time at his craft, the trader spends his time trading, and the Koranic Malam studies and teaches the Koran.

3. The Influence of Contact with the Industrial West.

86 177 [559] The third variable which must be considered in looking at social stratification in Geidam is the influence of contact with the Industrial West. In discussing this factor it is necessary to look once again at the dimensions which determine social position in Kanuri culture: power, wealth,

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177 prestige, and the distinction between slave and free-born.
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177 The direct influence of the British colonial administra-
567 tion has removed the legal support behind the master-slave
565 relationship, so that slaves can no longer be bought and sold,
648 and slaves who have run away cannot be forcibly returned to their masters by the police. This has radically altered the relation between master and slave, so that the distinction between slave and free-born is significant only in special cases.

64 By and large, the colonial administration, because of
177 its policy of indirect rule, has allowed political power to
178 remain in the hands of the same segments of the society as
565 previously held power. However, some changes have been made by the British, so that representatives are elected to a Northern House of Assembly and to a Federal Legislature. In Geidam,
634 political power is largely in the hands of the Ajia, who typ-
177 ifies the aristocracy. Yerima Mustapha as Ajia of Geidam is
178 a perfect example of the aristocrat who has skillfully adapt-
565 ed to the changes demanded of a present-day Ajia, and at the same time has succeeded in perpetuating the old social order. Other positions of power such as those of the Lowans, are held by men faithful to him, chosen from his Kabuna, another traditional group which has continued on into the present in Geidam. The position of Alkali in Geidam is held by still another
[648] member of the aristocracy; and what is more, the Alkali of Geidam, Alkali Baba Kura, was elected representative to the

177 prestige in addition to those previously available in Kanuri
178 culture, and that these new paths are sometimes in conflict
554 with the traditional paths. These conflicts in turn have
565 brought about shifts in the relative positions of certain groups in the community structure, particularly among the talaka. The position of these groups in relation to one another in the community of Geidam represents the social structure of Geidam. The social structure of Geidam, then, is a
56 178 result of the interaction of the three variables discussed
369 here: the traditional system of social stratification, the
177 urban nature of the community, and the influences upon it of the Industrial West.

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Peasants often complained of excess taxation, or bad judicial decisions, or the harshness of some upper class person. Again most peasants when asked about Nigerian independence, thought of the idea as horrendous, for with the British gone they believe that they would be oppressed as of old by the upper class. Does this constitute a "class conflict?" If by "class conflict" is meant an opposition of interests, goals, loyalties of different ranks in society, then there is no "class struggle" in Bornu. The study has shown that there is no total reliance or identification of any whole strata or class horizontally across the society. A man feels friendly and culturally comfortable with his social equals. He also feels socially and psychologically comfortable with his followers, subordinates, kinsmen (if not competitors), close friends, and they with him. A peasant-commoner is not one among the masses of his social equals. He is someone's peasant, i.e. he is ranked in a system of superior/subordinate relationships that link him to a great complex feudal organization which is the State. This means, to use Gluckman's phrase, that the society is "crosslinked" by class and status on the one hand which bring together people of similar goals, rank, class, and wealth; and on the other hand, by feudal chains of superior/subordinate relations that link up individuals into a vertical system of loyalties so that a man's ties are both with his class and with his superiors. It is very difficult to imagine a "class conflict" while this kind of social organization is operating. However, the analysis allows us to see the conditions of change of the system. If the stability of the social organization depends, as this argument suggests, to a large extent on the cross-linkage of social relationships, then if these cross-links were to end or weaken, serious conflicts might result either horizontally or vertically depending upon

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(1) See Gluckman, Max, Custom and Conflict in Africa, Oxford:Blackwell, 1955.

882 will lead them to their adult roles in the socio-economic structure of
582 the society. Since boys do not marry until the end of this period, first marriages are much later for males as compared to females.

885 By maturity, the Kanuri mean several things. For a man it means that he is married, has a compound of his own, an occupation, the use of some land for farming, a recognised position in the community organization as the head of a household and some degree of independence. When some of these social attributes are lacking the person often refers to himself as a "small boy" no matter what his age. There is no one status term meaning maturity for females, although terms exist which define her status as a woman who has had a child or not, as middle aged, and so on.

888 Old age for women often means dependence upon her sons if she has any, plus some petty trade in order to help sustain herself economically. For men, old age can be viewed on a continuum running from the one pole of successful seniority achieved or ascribed during life, to its opposable and supportative complement, subordination. Some achieve their seniority, others support this achievement by acting as subordinates, sometimes only as stepping stones to their own growth in seniority, or at other times, as a life goal in itself. However, it should be remembered that all men, even the Shehu, are in some sense subordinate in the total social structure.

• 56 The discussion of stratification has been organized within a theoretical framework in which the complex differentiation of Kanuri society is classified into status dimensions. These are sets of agreed upon rankings of persons within some specified area of behaviour. For the present discussion the status dimensions of ethnic membership, occupation, birth ascription, wealth, and rural/urban status, have been considered in some detail.